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SUBJECT: IRAN REGIONAL PRESENCE OFFICE - WINDOW ON IRAN - MARCH 3,
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CLASSIFIED BY: Ramin Asgard, Director, Iran Regional Presence
Office - Dubai, DOS.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)
[1](#)1. [S/NF] Reformist MP Khoeni On Past and Present of Reform
Movement:

PAST: Former Reformist parliamentarian Mohammad Mousavi Khoeni [strictly protect], who served in the Sixth Majles (2000-2004), met with IRPO on March 1 and 3. Mousavi Khoeni entered the Majles from a leadership position in the Office for Consolidating Unity, Iran's oldest and largest student organization. Himself coming from an IT background, during his Majles tenure he played a central role in establishing (through enabling legislation and funding) Iran's broadband internet infrastructure (without opposition early on as IRIG regulators did not realize what terms like "ADSL" appearing in relevant legislation even meant). Later, when the Supreme Leader's Office learned of the implications of such wide internet access, and acted to curtail its growing impact, the genie was already out of the bottle and Iran's entry into cyberspace could only be slowed, but not stopped. As a former political prisoner himself, Khoeni also led Majles efforts to reform Iran's prisons, particularly those sites holding political prisoners. In particular, he discovered that the IRGC, MOIS, LEF, and Ministry of Justice, all maintained secret prisons where prisoners were held incognito and without charges, and demanded that the Majles have access to these sites. In addition to reforming practices in the notorious MOIS "209" section of Evin Prison, (which houses high profile political prisoners), his efforts led to the closing of the "Towhid" prison, a large secret facility adjacent to the MFA building in Tehran. He added that his work uncovered that several government bodies maintained secret prison sites within Evin prison, with the IRGC's being by far the most sensitive (not even the prison warden or officials from Department of Corrections were admitted).

PRESENT: Khoeni was clearly proud of these initiatives, and the work of the Sixth Majles which had accomplished much he said, but concluded that the Reformists had ultimately failed to meet the huge popular expectations that swept them to power. "We tried working within the system for eight years, but in the end it was inadequate". At this point, he thinks reformists are

only "wasting time" working with the system as currently structured, although he still supports their efforts in principle. While he does not actively support Khatami's candidacy, he supports active reformist participation in the June 2009 presidential election. During the campaign period, he explained, groups - such as women's rights organizations for example - have been traditionally granted considerable leeway to express their often controversial positions with relative impunity. What is really needed to bring real and lasting reform, he said, was to modify the institutions of the Islamic Republic, (but not, he emphasized, through regime change). To make the required changes, he noted, the reformists need to build up a power base outside the government. This is difficult, he lamented, as they continue to lack media access beyond the internet. During the Sixth Majles, this lack of media access limited the reformists' ability to publicize their successes, and allowed their opponents to portray their tenure, and President Khatami's, both at the time and subsequently, in a negative light. [Note: Such tactical manipulation of media access by hardliners was also cited recently by another IRPO contact, who suggested that reformist presidential candidate Mehdi Karroubi appeared three times on IRIB during recent 30th Anniversary broadcasts as a ploy to raise his profile and thereby draw support from the much more dangerous reformist candidate, Khatami.]

IRPO will include Mousavi-Khoeni's views on future directions of the Reformist Movement within a septel focused on this subject.

12. [S/NF] U. of Tehran Professor Offers Views on Academic Engagement, Track II: University of Tehran Political Science professor Dr. Saideh Lotfian spoke with IRPO about the current academic environment at UT and the challenges of remaining engaged internationally. Lotfian has requested permission

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through the MFA Commission on US-Iran exchanges to attend a May conference at Princeton. She recounted that she was the first person she knew of to actually observe this new requirement announced in October 2008 requiring Iranian academics and others to receive MFA clearance before attending a US program. Lotfian marveled that no one she spoke to regarding the request was actually aware of the new requirement, including the international affairs office that arranges UT attendance at such US programs. In her opinion, this MFA effort does not represent a coordinated, top-down effort to stifle US-Iran exchanges, but is more likely an MFA effort to gain some control and visibility over such programs. She recommended that increased transparency and some level of engagement regarding exchanges would help dispel anxieties over US motives. Professor Lotfian noted that there are many officials formerly with the MFA teaching in her faculty (Law and Political Science) at UT or at the Center for Strategic Research (CSR), which is affiliated with the Expediency Council, which would be strongly supportive of greater engagement with their American counterparts. Among these, she specifically cited Dr. (Ambassador) Ali Mousavian, Dr. (Ambassador) Javad Zarif, Dr. Sayyed Mohammad Marandi, and several others. Dr. Lotfian noted Track II talks were another good way to enhance engagement. Lotfian herself has participated in various Track II programs, including the Pugwash talks, and used them as an example for why greater transparency was important. "Nothing stays secret long in Iran," she said, noting that even the secret Track II Pugwash talks were soon afterwards common knowledge in academic and government circles in Iran, including access to a full lists of all attendees.

13. [S/NF] Iran's Schizophrenic Approach to Public Diplomacy: The Hollywood delegation visiting Iran this week has been warmly received by Iranian film makers, but also met with an IRIG demand for a public apology for past cinematic insults to the

Iranian nation. This schizophrenic response is typical of the recent IRIG approach to exchanges. IRIG officials, including President Ahmadinejad, have called for more exchanges, especially Americans visiting Iran, and the Iranian state media have highlighted American visitors, like U.S. journalists invited to a recent seminar or the award given by the Ministry of Science to three U.S. academics in December. Contrast that with the harassment of a National Academy of Sciences official at the same time or obstruction of USG-sponsored exchanges, and Iran's attitude toward them is ambiguous at best. An Iranian oncologist nominated for a breast cancer awareness IVLP last fall told us this week that it was the Ministry of Health that forced her to cancel her participation, after the Ministry of Intelligence and Security had approved the group's trip to the U.S. Comment: The overriding conclusion we can draw is that Iranian officials will continue to see any USG involvement in exchanges, at least for now, as a threat to the regime. At the same time, those that take place under the control of the IRIG are likely simply opportunities to promote Iran's "good will" and counter negative press. We would add that much of this is for domestic consumption. But there is also the problem of Iran's decentralized intelligence and security services, which as the experience of the oncologist shows, often do not coordinate and have different interpretations on what is permissible.

¶4. [S/NF] Update on StarTV Persia Project: StarTV executives told us that their Farsi One channel will begin broadcasting to Iran in early April. Dubai officials have given the project all required licenses and approvals, and they had voiced no further concerns, Star TV officials said. The channel will show U.S. and other entertainment programming, all dubbed in Farsi, and beamed to Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan. They repeated their appreciation for USG support for the project and for weighing in with UAE officials. Comment: StarTV's channel will add to the Western-based alternatives to IRIB among Iranian viewers, further pressuring the state-controlled broadcaster and the IRIG to compete for viewers, and to worry about malign Western influences, like Bart Simpson.

¶5. [C] Ahmadinejad Raising Pensions to Win Over Voters?: An Iranian journalist said President Ahmadinejad has doubled

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retired teachers' pension payments in a likely bid to garner support ahead of the presidential election in June. The journalist's mother, a retired teacher, saw her pension rise from approximately \$250 per month to \$500 in the last few months. Although the journalist-whose comments on other matters appeared in last week's WOI-does not know if Ahmadinejad's gambit will be successful, he suspects that retired teachers will at least have to think a bit harder about who to vote for in the election. Comment: Coupled with reports from other IRPO contacts that Ahmadinejad increased subsidies for basic commodities, the journalist's comments suggest Ahmadinejad is trying to blunt the affect of Iran's economic downturn on his electoral prospects. As Ahmadinejad's mismanagement of the economy will be a key issue in the election and a central tenet of attacks against him, the President appears to be trying to deliver needed financial relief and undermine his critics' attacks at the same time.

¶6. [S/NF] IRIG Failing To Pay Iranian Companies?: An Iranian-American businessman just back from Iran told us that Iranian businessmen have recently started to face an additional obstacle: collecting what they are owed by the government. He said Iranian companies doing business with IRIG, already lacking access to international credit, have incurred higher costs and demands for cash from sellers. Now the IRIG is telling businesses providing some high-end equipment - like cell-phone

networking infrastructure - that they were not going to be paid, according to our contact. Comment: Our contact could not say how widespread this has become or whether it meant that elements within the IRIG were running short of cash but he did say that it was a recent phenomena and that he had heard of more than one example of it happening.

17. [U] Window on Iran is a classified, weekly product providing Washington policy community and Iran watchers highlights of key developments on Iran. It is produced by the Iran Regional Presence Office - Dubai. Please direct any questions/comments to Kay McGowan (mcgowanka2@state.sgov.gov) or Charlie Pennypacker (pennypacker@state.sgov.gov).
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